

MORAVIAN INFLUENCE IN THE SETTLEMENT &
EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF LEBANON COUNTY, PA.

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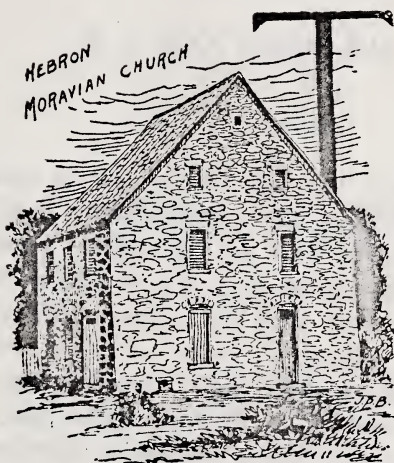
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Settlement and Early Development of Lebanon County, Pa.

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LEBANON, PA.

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MORAVIAN CHURCH AT HEBRON
ERECTED IN 1749

Moravian Influence in the Settlement and Early Development of Lebanon County

By J. MAX HARK, D.D.

If one were to try to find out just what elements have been contributed to the waters of the Susquehanna by each of the many lesser streams of the sum of whose waters it is composed, it would be found to be a well-nigh impossible task. The contributions of all have been largely alike; yet each has given some few elements peculiar to itself and different from all the rest. This much we know. But when we come to say which elements in the final combination are derived from which tributaries, and in what quantity and what proportions, we find the problem so intricate and complex that we are fain to leave it unsolved.

I confess to have had a similar feeling when your Secretary first urged me, a few weeks ago, to prepare a paper on "*Moravian Influence in the Settlement and Early Development of Lebanon County*." I looked at the tide of human life that surges with unceasing ebb and flow throughout our county. I beheld its varied characteristics, its different interests and occupations, its hopes and aspirations and ideals, as manifested in its domestic, social, religious, agricultural and industrial activities,—all closely knit into a thoroughly homogeneous, distinctively Pennsylvania-German community. How different from any one of the heterogeneous sources that combined to give it being! It is a composite image that is stamped

upon it. Who shall correctly analyse it and trace its various lineaments to their several originals? With the limited time and means at my disposal I shall certainly not presume even to attempt it; but shall consider myself fortunate if I succeed in describing a very few of the distinguishing elements of one of the smallest of the streams of influence that early contributed with many others to give being and direction to the forces that have stamped its character upon the life of Lebanon County.

In many respects the early Moravian immigrants into the county were very like all the other German settlers here. But in one thing they differed from them altogether. Failure to take this difference into account has caused them to be misunderstood and misrepresented by many historians, just as it was the reason for their being unappreciated, suspected, and even hated by many of their fellow settlers of other denominations. Yet it was probably the very thing that, despite their small numbers, enabled them to exert the influence they did, though this was of such a nature that it is impossible to measure it, or even to trace it with any definiteness.

The Lutherans and Reformed who came to America from the Palatinate, as also the followers of Menno Simonis, the Friends, Schwenkfelders, Dunkards, etc., left their native lands for conscience sake. The great numbers who chose Pennsylvania as their new home did so because of the religious freedom offered them by Penn. The great preponderance of Germans settling in Lebanon County was caused by the large body of Palatines who came down the Susquehanna and then up the Swatara from New York State during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, driven by poverty and hardships imposed upon them largely through the greed and fraud of the land owners and other unscrupulous inhabitants, official and unofficial, among whom they had tried to settle along the Hudson. They found here in our fruitful valley all the conditions for that peaceful if laborious agricultural life for which they were best adapted. And in an astonishingly short time their skill and industry had cleared the land and cultivated the fields, built themselves comfortable homes.

capacious barns filled to bursting, and mills kept busy converting the fruits of the fields into food for man and beast.

They were a churchly people, these German and Swiss pioneers, and had brought their Bibles and hymnals with them. Perhaps they were too churchly, too dependent in the old country upon the State church and its pastors for their guidance and the regulation of their lives. For when they came into this new, wild land without church and without clergy, they seemed like sheep lost in the wilderness without a shepherd. The old people, indeed, held fast to their religion. But we are not surprised that the new generations of them grew up not only without ecclesiastical organization, but spiritually careless and indifferent, and with nothing but tradition to restrain or to guide them. Their hard life and incessant struggle with their material environment left little occasion or inclination for spiritual development. They were too busy.

"Busy with hewing and building, with garden-plot and with merestead. Busy with breaking the glebe, and mowing the grass in the meadows."

All authorities agree that their religious condition was deplorable, ecclesiastically chaotic, ethically demoralized, and spiritually degraded, during the decades preceding and almost up to the middle of the eighteenth century. It is true there were a few itinerant, self-constituted preachers, who went back and forth among them; but as a rule neither the hard theology that they preached nor the loose lives they lived was conducive to the vital religion of the people. Some of the more devout Germans did send to the ecclesiastical authorities at home, earnestly petitioning for regular ministers to be sent them. One of these petitions, sent to Dr. Ziegenhagen, the German Court preacher in London, and to the theological faculties at Halle and Tubingen, contains these touching words: "Living in a land in which divisions in religious opinions are almost countless, being destitute of that food for our souls which we need, and unable to find ways and means in our own community to supply our wants, we pray God to show us through our friends abroad what may be done for us." But for some rea-

son, chiefly because no adequate salaries could be promised, and no suitable men were available, these pious requests were disregarded, and their authors left without the spiritual food and guidance they craved and sorely needed.

Just at this point it was that the Moravians appeared upon the scene. They came to our new western world not because driven from home by religious intolerance, or by poverty and hardships, nor yet in search of comfortable homes and temporal prosperity; but for exactly the opposite reason. They voluntarily left their comfortable homes and prosperous circumstances and peaceful churches to take up a life of discomfort, hardship and danger in an unknown wilderness, solely and alone for the love of Christ and their fellow-men. Like the other settlers here, they were Germans, though not Palatines but mostly Saxons, and some from Moravia. Like them many were skilled farmers, millers, blacksmiths and carpenters. But unlike them they were accompanied and led by their bishops, pastors and teachers, and maintained their regular church organization and discipline. Their leaders, like Spangenberg, Boehler, Seidel, Lembke, Cammerhof, were graduates or had been professors of the leading German universities, or refined noblemen like Zinzendorf and De Watteville, who thus renounced luxury, fame and titles in the name of Christ, to assume the perilous lot and hard life of pioneers in the wilds of Pennsylvania. It was thus a new and different element that these Moravians brought into the composite life of our State and county.

Their coming here to this county was in this wise: In April of 1736 Augustus Spangenberg came from Herrnhut, Saxony, to labor among the Schwenkfelders who had settled along the Skippack in Philadelphia County,—not to make Moravians of them, but to serve them in the gospel and otherwise until they should have perfected their own organization. The same year Bishop Nitschmann came over, and traveled through the rural districts to investigate the religious condition of the German settlers in the State, among the rest visiting the Seventh Day Baptists' settlement at Ephrata. It was while at Skippack that Spangenberg met Conrad Weiser, and

enlisted the interest and assistance of this remarkable man in the work of the Moravian Church, an interest which never waned while Weiser lived, but grew deeper with the years. From him Spangenberg learned of the degraded condition of the Indians, which he reported to the church authorities at home, and which resulted in Christian Henry Rauch's coming over in 1739, and commencing, at Shekomeko, N. Y., the extensive Moravian mission work among the Indians which was so remarkably successful and so fraught with far-reaching and important consequences to the future of the Province.

With this report concerning the Indians Weiser also told Spangenberg of the deplorable religious needs and ecclesiastical confusion existing among the Germans, especially in the region round about the Tulpehocken where Weiser lived. Spangenberg in turn reported all this to Zinzendorf, as also did Bishop Nitschmann. The result was that Zinzendorf, late in 1741, came to America to see for himself, and to devise means for bringing the gospel to the whites and Indians alike. Very soon after his arrival, early in 1742, he visited Weiser at his home to consult with him, and to enlist his aid as guide and interpreter on his proposed journey to the Indian headquarters at Shamokin.

Before doing this however, the zealous and indefatigable Count, hearing of the efforts of Henry Antes,—at that time still a devout adherent of the Reformed Church, residing at Falkner's Swamp,—to further the spiritual life of the Germans of every name by uniting them for worship and religious edification, joined hands with him, and finally formulated his noble, if at that time chimerical, plan of uniting all the German christians, of whatever denomination, into an organized alliance which he designated as a "Church of God in the Spirit." His purpose was to organize the German settlers into regular churches or congregations, each to decide for itself to what denomination it would belong and what form of worship it would follow. These congregations were then to be supplied with regular pastors, of their own faith if possible, if not, then of another; the main consideration being that they must be men of genuine and approved piety. If they were real spiritually-minded christians their special theological

views need not be considered. All were to join in a union synod composed of all denominations. Says Dr. Paul De Schweinitz: "These remarkable gatherings were held at frequent intervals each year from January 1742, to October 1748. But though nobly conceived, the idea was premature. After the first seven gatherings the Lutherans and Reformed withdrew, and then one by one the other denominations dropped out until October 27, 1748, when the synod had practically become the Moravian Synod. Nevertheless the work accomplished by the Moravian Brethren for their religiously destitute German countrymen was marvelous.

"At their own expense they sent itinerant missionaries up and down the country proclaiming the gospel to all who would hear them and seeking to gather together congregations of awakened souls. When such a congregation was gathered, it was asked to decide whether it would become Lutheran or Reformed, or what. If the congregation adopted the Lutheran confession of faith, a Brother was ordained for it as a Lutheran pastor, and no claim was made upon it by the Moravians for their labor. If the Reformed confession of faith was adopted, a Brother was in the same way ordained as a Reformed pastor. If the congregation could not decide upon one of these two confessions, a 'Free church of God in the Spirit' was organized, and an ordained Brother was given it as pastor."

It was in pursuance of this ideally unselfish policy, to supply the crying needs of the neglected Germans that the Moravians traversed the forsests, crossed the mountains, and forded the streams of our county in every direction. They preached in barns and private houses, and visited with the comforts of the gospel nearly every home, baptizing their children and burying their dead, trying to rekindle everywhere a fresh interest in spiritual things and renewed faith and hope and love to lighten and sweeten the daily life of the people.

That they succeeded in this to a far greater extent than any records can tell no one will doubt. Dr. Theo. Schmauck, in his admirable Paper, "The Early Churches of Lebanon County" justly calls this period, especially the years from

about 1740 to 1750, "The Period of Awakening." It is indicated, moreover, by such facts as this, that when Count Zinzendorf made his journey to the Indians at Shamokin, by way of Tulpehocken and through the Swatara Gap, in the Autumn of 1742, he spent some hours with John Philip Meurer, whom he had appointed pastor over the congregation, chiefly Lutheran, at the former place, where Spangenberg had visited and the zealous Andrew Eshenbach had preached on his itinerancy through this region the year before. In his Journal Zinzendorf has this significant entry under date of September 23rd. "In Tulpehocken I had a slight contest with Satan about the sacraments. A fierce fight was imminent, but a few hours removed the occasion of offence. I changed my plans in reference to Meurer and felt dispirited. His hearers presume to rank him equal with, and even superior to Buttner or Eshenbach. I conferred on him temporary powers as minister of the gospel by giving him a written certificate to that effect, and this satisfied him. I feel convinced that he will discharge his new functions with acceptance and blessing." Meurer had been appointed to succeed Buttner whom Zinzendorf had sent in response to a request for a godly pastor by one party of the Lutheran congregation in February of that same year. The Tulpehocken church at that time was having trouble with John Casper Stoever, which is probably what Zinzendorf refers to.

It is not necessary here to refer to the deplorable and bitter contest that goes under the name of "The Confusion at Tulpehocken." A church had been built in 1727 and was served by a Lutheran pastor Leibbecker, or Leutbecker, by name. The zealous and indefatigable Stoever contested his right and even tried to gain forcible possession of the church. After Leutbecker's death in 1738, and his burial by Spangenberg, the congregation petitioned the Moravians for another pastor. Buttner was appointed. But, troubles continued. Buttner resigned rather than agree to resort to the law against Stoever. Then, in May, 1742, the church property was bought outright by the congregation. Stoever's party built another church, known as Christ Lutheran Church, and Buttner returned to his former charge, but soon was succeeded by Meurer.

er. By this time the "Church of God in the Spirit" and the union synods were rapidly disintegrating and jealousy and suspicion of the Moravians were springing up; and though a stone church, known as Reith's Church, had taken the place of the original one of logs and had been solemnly consecrated by Bishop Spangenberg on December 1, 1744, of which Meurer continued pastor until March, 1746, the peace-loving Moravians finally surrendered all their rights in the property to the Lutherans in 1747. The school in connection with the church, however, continued to be in charge of a Moravian teacher for some time longer. Those members who would not join the Lutheran communion, joined the little Moravian congregation at Heidelberg, near the present Schaefferstown, whose log church Spangenberg had consecrated only a short time before. They were George Loesch and wife, Michael Schaeffer and wife, and the widow of Herman Wallborn. This church too, after being served for years by itinerant preachers, went out of existence as a separate organization.

The fervid preaching and faithful labors of Eshenbach and other Moravian pioneers, bore fruit in other parts of the county also, as Zinzendorf found on this same missionary journey in the fall of 1742. On September 24, he writes in his Journal: "Set out from Weiser's, and in the evening came to a log house at the foot of the Kittatinny or Blue Mountain." This was at the great Swatara Gap, called Toltheo by the Indians, and by the whites corrupted into "The Hole." Here a number of worthy families lived who had been awakened by the gospel, and who, in 1743 or 1744, formed themselves into a congregation, and built the Bethel Church. Peter Kucher assisted them, of whom we shall hear more hereafter, and Heinrich Xander, a Swiss immigrant of the Reformed faith, who later became prominent in the Hebron Church.

The Bethel Church was a two storied log building, with two rooms on the first floor for school purposes, or the pastor's residence, and a "Bet Saal" taking up the upper floor, where the congregation worshipped. The building is said to have stood until 1878. This congregation was peculiarly exposed to danger from the incursions of the Indians, as the Swatara Gap was the gateway through which the main trail

led from the Red Man's homes north of the Blue Mountains to the white man's Settlements on the south and east. The little church stood as a sentinel on the dividing line, as it were, between the savages and civilization; and its members were always the first to warn the settlers of the country, and indeed the first to suffer too, when the savages rushed down to kill and ravage the white men against whom they had been sent in those dreadful days of the French and Indian War in 1755 and 1756.

The humble graveyard near the church, now sadly neglected, was a mute witness of the horrors of those days. The record of deaths and burials reveals in a few lines some of the tragedies then enacted. Let me translate an entry made on June 26th 1756. "In the Indian war the following four Brethren who resided in The Hole. Franz Albert and Jacob Haendsche, two men, and Friederich Weiser and Johan George Miess, two boys, were suddenly attacked, killed and scalped this afternoon by wild Indians, in old man Fischer's field, where they were plowing together because of the danger. On Sunday, June 27th they were buried together in our graveyard, Bro. Frederick Schlegel officiating, assisted by Bro. Sam. Herr who happened to be here at the time. A large body of soldiers and other men from The Hole guarded the funeral party, and probably two hundred people attended the services." Bro. Albert, we are also told, was "by profession a shoemaker," and Bro. Haendsche a stone mason. The two boys were respectively sixteen and seventeen years old. The record is brief and prosaic; but who could express all that it meant, how crowded it was with horror and anguish, for the little congregation? These four with many others lie buried on the Bethel graveyard, and if we could decipher the weather-worn and moss-covered stones there, we should no doubt be able to uncover many another tale of heroism and suffering endured. But after all, what matters it that we cannot? Those who sleep there lived their lives and did their work well, and they have served their purpose. The church, like the congregation, has passed away and is no more. But they too, did their work and fulfilled their mission.

Those pioneer Moravians, whose heroic faith, fervid love

and unquenchable zeal were instrumental in awakening the slumbering souls of the early settlers of our county, did not labor and suffer in vain. They came on their mission of love at a critical period. They supplied a crying need. They did not build up, increase or enrich their denomination; but they built up and enriched the life of Lebanon County, and made it ready for what was to come after them. They sowed good seed. Others watered it. We are still reaping the fruits. The very fact that men could not understand or believe their unselfish motives, and that their activity aroused the suspicion, jealousy and hatred for a time, of the other denominations, served a useful purpose. It caused the German State Church especially to rouse itself and send over men "to stay the inroads of the Moravians," and so gave the settlers what they needed, wise and strong organizers and leaders, like Muhlenberg and Schlatter, under whom churches soon sprang up everywhere and the cause of Christ was made to prosper amazingly.

Let us now yet glance at the work of the Moravians during the closing years of, and after, the "Period of the Awakening." As we saw, they continued for some years their labors at Heidelberg and Bethel, and their itinerant preaching and visitations throughout the county. Gradually, however, their efforts seem to have centered more and more around Hebron, just east of the newly laid out village of George Stites, since grown into our city of Lebanon. It is, by the way, a question whether they were not the sponsors, indirectly at least, of Lebanon. George Stites was on friendly terms with members and preachers of the Moravian Church, especially with Peter Kucher; and it is not improbable that the suggestion to change the name of "Stitestaedtel" on his town plan to the biblical one of Lebanon came to Stites from them; for they were accustomed, wherever they could, to give scriptural names to their settlements, as witness Bethlehem, Nazareth, Emaus, Nain, Bethel, and others.

It appears that while the regular evangelists who established regular congregations at Tulpehocken, Heidelberg and Bethel, also visited and preached "on the Quittapahilla" before Stitestown was, it was not they who made it a regular

preaching place. "On the Quittapahilla" seems to have been on the circuit that included Warwick, Conestoga and Codorus, the names by which Lititz, Lancaster and York are referred to in the earliest Diaries. We read in an old Hebron Journal that the congregation here was begun "as a result of the preaching of Bro. Nyberg, in Lancaster, and because of the bad state of religion here." This seems to have been prior to 1748, though Nyberg was pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster up to 1746. It is altogether probable that the Hebron congregation was really started at the Synod held in 1748, probably in the old "Grubeland" Lutheran Church, then standing, according to Dr. Schmauk in his exhaustive history of "Old Salem in Lebanon," about two and a half miles south-east of Lebanon. At least we are told that at this Synod Bro. and Sr. Hertz were appointed "arbeiter" here, i. e. he was made regular pastor. We also know that in that year Lorenz Nyberg, who had withdrawn from the Lutherans and become pastor of the Moravian Church at Lancaster, preached here for the first time. The formal organization of the Hebron congregation did not take place until January 19, 1750, when also the Holy Communion was celebrated for the first time, "in the Lutheran Church," no doubt the same in which the synod had been held. The first communicant members were Peter Kucher, Balthazer Orth, Sr., Heinrich Xander, Michael Kap, George Loesch and Adam Ketterling.

At this time the building of their stone church was already under way. It was commenced in 1749, on land given by Peter Kucher, and was completed as combined church and school house, and dedicated with appropriate services, on the 16th of January, 1751. A large two storied stone structure, with peaked roof, it was the scene of many and varied happenings in the century and a half during which it stood, about a mile east of the present Moravian Church, a little south of the Turnpike, now Cumberland Street. It was the witness of more anxiety and terror when, during the French and Indian War, all the trees around it had to be cut down so that the hostile Indians might not be able to surprise its inmates, and the windows of the lower floor were boarded up, and the doors barricaded, against the momentarily expected assaults of the sav-

ages. It saw with horrified grief the poor body of Johann Spittler, scalped and mangled by the Indians on May 16, 1757, hard by his humble home on the Swatara, as it was carried through its door for burial. It beheld the scenes of dismay and sore discomfort when during the Revolution some 270 Hessian prisoners, taken at Princeton and Trenton, were crowded within its sacred walls for months, to the disgust of the peaceful pastor Bader and his cleanly and order-loving wife. Scenes also of gladness and joy there were, as when with full orchestra, trombones and choir the little congregation gathered there to celebrate its Christmas, and to give the children their lighted wax candles, with apples, at the Christmas Eve "Love-Feast." For this glad festival the church was always decorated with evergreens, while the school room had its "Putz" erected, consisting of a background of fragrant boughs of spruce and a table covered with moss, on which was arranged a representation of the Nativity, the stable with manager and oxen, Joseph and the Virgin with the blessed Child, shepherds from the hills come to worship, and the Wise Men from the East with their camels laden with gifts, while over all shone resplendant the Star of Bethlehem. Happy occasions, too, were the visits of "Brother Joseph" as the learned and beloved Bishop Spangenberg was called, of the equally scholarly and devout Bishop Peter Boehler, Nathaniel Seidel, Christian Seidel, Christian Henry Rauch, the first missionary to the Indians, who served as pastor here for a time, of Matthew Hehl, and many others as eminent in the annals of the Moravian Church and whose works do follow them even unto the present day.

It is a pity that the old historic building should have been torn down. But nothing is venerable or sacred enough to withstand the inroads of "Progress" and "Improvement." It had a useful life, and a long one as the lives of buildings go in this rushing land of ours. So we must not complain. Rather let us be thankful that it fulfilled its mission so well, and that, when a town had grown up to the west of it, and its congregation felt constrained to leave it and build another house of worship in 1848, its members could take with them the precious memories that clustered about those ancient walls, to inspire them to be earnest and faithful as were their fathers

at Hebron. These did their humble part in laying firm foundations, of faith and industry and sterling integrity, for the future city. It is for all of us worthily to continue building thereon.

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It would be interesting yet to refer to the Moravians' contribution to the musical development of Lebanon,—for they were always and everywhere devoted to musical culture, and the Moravian David Tanneberg built the best and most of the organs that were built during the latter half of the eighteenth century, not only in our county, but in many other places as well;—and to the cause of education, from their first school in Tulpehocken to the old academy on Tenth Street, which so long was in the hands of the Moravian Kluge;—but time will not permit.

Nor can I say anything at this time concerning the worthy individual members of the early Moravian congregations in the county,—the Orths, Xanders and Loeschs, the Houcks, Miesses, Meilys, Krauses, and Kapps and Spittlers, the Buchers, Mishs, Meyers, Urichs, and many others, whose blood runs in the veins of hundreds of our citizens. That alone would furnish material for many papers.

But one man there was, so eminent for his good deeds, and truly christian character, and so important a factor in our early Moravians' work in the county, that my paper would be even more incomplete than it is if he were not mentioned. I refer to Peter Kucher, who may be called the "Father of the Hebron congregation." As we saw, it was he who gave the land on which the old church was built. Already before that, in 1748, he had donated the tract, a short distance east of the church, on a commanding eminence, for the Hebron graveyard, where on the 29th of March of that year, his year-old son, Michael, was the first one to be buried. Kucher was born in Waldau, Saxony, on May 12, 1710. His parents were George Peter and Barbara Kucher. In 1732 he came to America and worked at his blacksmith trade and farming near the Quittapahilla. Here he married on October 6, 1735, and became the father of ten children. From being a members of the Lutheran Church at Tulpehocken, he was received into the Moravian Church at Heidelberg, by Bishop Spangenberg.

on February 2, 1749. Before this, however, he had acquired at Hebron a tract of land extending eastward on the Quittapahilla from about where Front Street now is, and his hospitable home seems to have been the stopping place for nearly all the visiting Moravian ministers as long as he lived. He was active in the church's work, wise in counsel, and liberal in its service at all times. In 1761 he built a large and commodious home on the banks of the Quittapahilla, either on the site of or near the old one, which was considered a mansion, being a two and a half storied stone structure, with a wide middle hallway, and easy central staircase of hardwood. At the time there was not another like it in Lebanon. During the Indian War in 1755 and 1756 he was in charge of the line of watchmen extending a mile on either side of Hebron; and his house, besides the church, were offered as places of safety for the refugees that were expected, and some of whom came when the Indians continued ravaging and murdering southward from the mountains. Bro. Kucher ended his useful life on the morning of Christmas Eve, 1774. We are told by his pastor Bro. Bader that he "fell gently asleep" at half past eleven o'clock, at peace with his Savior and his fellow men, aged sixty-four years, seven months and eleven days. He was buried on Christmas day at two o'clock, after funeral services in the church he had loved and served so well. Bro. Bader who conducted the simple service says there was such a crowd present that he would have held the service out of doors if the snow had not been so deep and it had not rained so hard. As it was, after every nook and corner of the church building had been filled with friends, many had to stand outside in the rain.

No monument marks his grave, but only the flat slab of marble like unto all the others to show that in death we are all alike. In this case the graveyard itself is his monument. And it is all that remains visible of the devoted little pioneer congregation at Hebron; but the invisible, the spiritual effects of the self-denying lives of those whose names are preserved on its humble stones, are they not felt to this day in the character of our community, the lives of its men and women, who, in new circumstances and by other methods perhaps, are yet trying to continue the work of their ancestors in serving their fellow men and glorifying their fathers' God?

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